

PUBLIC RECORDS, OPEN MEETINGS. LEGISLATIVE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT.

ARGUMENT in Favor of Proposition 59

Proposition 59 is about open and responsible government. A government that can hide what it does will never be accountable to the public it is supposed to serve. We need to know what the government is doing and how decisions are made in order to make the government work for us.

Everyone needs access to information from the government. Why was a building permit granted, or denied? Who is the Governor considering for appointment to a vacancy on the County Board of Supervisors? Why was the superintendent of the school district fired, and who is being considered as a replacement? Who did the City Council talk to before awarding a no-bid contract?

People all across the State ask these questions—and dozens of others—every day. And what they find out is that answers are hard to get.

California has laws that are supposed to help you get answers. But over the years they have been eroded by special interest legislation, by courts putting the burden on the public to justify disclosure, and by government officials who want to avoid scrutiny and keep secrets. Proposition 59 will help reverse that trend.

What will Proposition 59 do? It will create a new civil right: a constitutional right to know what the government is doing, why it is doing it, and how. It will ensure that public agencies, officials, and courts broadly apply laws that promote public knowledge. It will compel them to narrowly apply laws that limit openness in government—including discretionary privileges and exemptions that are routinely invoked even when there is no need for secrecy. It will create a high hurdle for

restrictions on your right to information, requiring a clear demonstration of the need for any new limitation. It will permit the courts to limit or eliminate laws that don't clear that hurdle. It will allow the public to see and understand the deliberative process through which decisions are made. It will put the burden on the government to show there is a real and legitimate need for secrecy before it denies you information.

At the same time, Proposition 59 ensures that private information about ordinary citizens will remain just that—private. It specifically says that your constitutional right to privacy won't be affected.

You have the right to decide how open your government should be. That's why Proposition 59 was unanimously passed by the Legislature and it is the reason widely diverse organizations support the Sunshine Amendment, including the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the League of California Cities.

As James Madison, a founding father and America's fourth President, said: "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives." Tell the government that it's ordinary citizens—not bureaucrats—who ought to decide what we need to know. Vote yes on Proposition 59.

MIKE MACHADO, *State Senator*

JACQUELINE JACOBBERGER, *President*
League of Women Voters of California

PETER SCHEER, *Executive Director*
California First Amendment Coalition

REBUTTAL to Argument in Favor of Proposition 59

As an attorney who has attempted for many years to use California laws to identify and weed out waste and corruption in local government, I am quite sympathetic to Proposition 59.

It is important, however, for voters to know what Proposition 59 would NOT do.

As written (by the State Legislature), Proposition 59 would continue to exempt from disclosure government records deemed "private" by the courts and would not apply at all to the "*confidentiality of proceedings and records of the Legislature, the Members of the Legislature, and its employees, committees, and caucuses* . . .".

Voters should also consider that insofar as electing some top persons in government (i.e., having a representative democracy) is key to making career government bureaucrats more accountable, elections (especially for

State Assembly, State Senate, and Congress) have been undermined by:

- (1) the dependence on private, special interest campaign money (sometimes called "legalized bribes"); and
- (2) the self-serving creation (every 10 years) of gerrymandered legislative districts that protect incumbents from competition.

Moreover, anyone who blindly trusts a computer program to count votes (without any "paper trail" for potential verification) is foolish.

Sadly, we are a long way from having true representative democracy in California—and across America.

Government is getting bigger and becoming more wasteful, insular, and abusive. Proposition 59 would not do much to reverse that alarming trend.

GARY B. WESLEY, *Attorney at Law*